

RE: Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Vegetation Treatments Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Western U.S., Including Alaska

Dear Resource Advisory Council Members:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is preparing a programmatic EIS to evaluate the impacts of the vegetative treatments on the environment and local economies. The BLM is proposing to treat vegetation on approximately six million acres annually in the western U.S., and Alaska. The purpose of these treatments is to conserve and restore the function of vegetation, watershed, and fish and wildlife habitat. Vegetation treatment methods could include mechanical, manual, chemical, biological, and cultural control, as well as prescribed fires. Cultural control utilizes goats and other animals.

Approximately half the acres would be treated to restore historic fire regimes and to reduce the risk of wildfires on BLM-administered lands. The BLM estimates that 1-1½ million acres of wildfire-damaged land would be treated annually under the Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation program. The BLM would manage the rest of the acreage under several programs, including control of noxious weeds, invasive plants, and the restoration of damaged lands by seeding and replanting.

As part of the program, the BLM is proposing to evaluate five new herbicides for possible use on public lands in the EIS. We are currently assessing risk to humans, fish, and wildlife from use of these chemicals. In addition, the BLM will develop a protocol as part of the EIS which will allow us to streamline the process of evaluation and approval of herbicides that may be developed in the future.

The vegetation treatment actions would occur on public lands administered by the BLM in Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Texas, Washington, and Wyoming. The enclosed sheet titled "Frequently Asked Questions" discusses the vegetation treatment's program and the EIS, and the enclosed map shows the locations of BLM-administered lands in your State.

The programmatic EIS is designed to look at the broad impacts associated with the design to implement the vegetation treatment program. Because the program covers such a large area, assessing site-specific impacts in this EIS is not realistic. This approach will allow the future development of more site-specific National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents, such as land-use plans and project-specific analysis. The need for repetitive discussion of the same issues in the site-specific documents will be eliminated.

The BLM is coordinating closely with other Federal, State, and local agencies, Native American Tribes, Alaska Native groups, and other interested stakeholders. The BLM recently completed public scoping and is in the process of reviewing comments and identifying alternative treatment actions to the proposed action, it is anticipated that the draft EIS will be completed later this fall.

The BLM seeks to address the effects of treatment methods on resources managed by the BLM. We ask that you review the enclosed materials and inform us of any concerns you might have about any of the proposed vegetation treatments. We will keep you informed as to the progress of the project. You may also visit the BLM website to learn more about the project:
<http://www.blm.gov/weeds/VegEIS/index.htm>.

If you have any questions, concerns, or would like additional information, please contact Gina Ramos, co-team lead at 202-452-4084 or Brian Amme, Project Manager at 775-861-6645.

Sincerely,

State Director

2 Enclosures

- 1- Frequently Asked Questions
- 2 - Project Area Map